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ABSTRACT

Data from the National Center for Education Statistics' 1993-94 annual Schools and Staffing Survey concerning the training of teachers of limited-English-proficient (LEP) students are summarized. LEP training was defined to include both pre-service and in-service training. In 1993-94, United States public schools enrolled over 2.1 million LEP students, with considerable variation by state and region. Teachers in areas with large proportions of LEP students were more likely to have LEP training. Over 12 percent of all students in the West were LEP, and nearly half their teachers had LEP training. Under 2 percent of Midwest students are LEP, with about 12 percent of teachers LEP trained. A similar pattern was found at the classroom level. However, in classes with low percentages of LEP students, English teachers were more likely than other core teachers to have LEP training. These patterns suggest that effort is being made to accommodate the needs of LEP students, as mandated by law. Research on the nature, extent, and quality of LEP training is recommended. Contains nine references. (MSE)

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ARE LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT (LEP) STUDENTS BEING TAUGHT BY TEACHERS WITH LEP TRAINING?

NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS ISSUE BRIEF

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ISSUE BRIEF

Are Limited English Proficient (LEP) Students Being Taught by Teachers with LEP Training?

DECEMBER 1996
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The United States is becoming a more ethnically and linguistically diverse society (O'Hare 1992; Martin and Midgley 1994), with over 90 percent of recent immigrants coming from non-English-speaking countries. In 1990, almost 2.3 million school-aged children spoke a language other than English at home and spoke English with difficulty, a 26 percent increase from 1980 (U.S. Department of Commerce 1993, 1984).

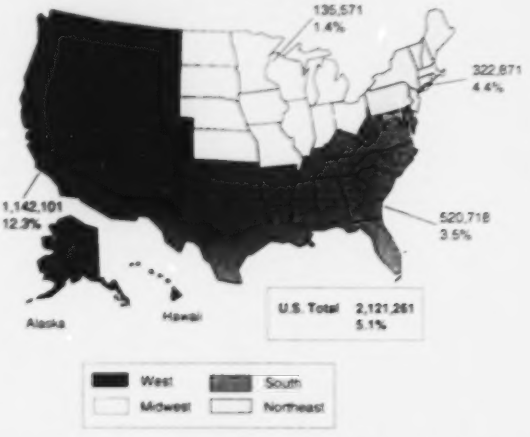
When children with little or no previous exposure to the English language enter the public schools, they are often unable to profit fully from English-language-based instruction. Exceptionally high dropout rates have been reported for these students (Bennici and Strang 1995). Federal legislation now supports the professional training of educational personnel who work with LEP students (Improving America's Schools Act 1994). Are public school teachers with LEP students in their classes trained in teaching LEP students? Are teachers with high percentages of LEP students in their classes more likely to have received LEP training than teachers with low percentages of LEP students? Since communication skills in English courses are so important, are teachers of English more likely to have received LEP training than teachers of other core subjects?

Data from the 1993–94 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), can be used to address these questions. In SASS, LEP students are defined as those students whose native or dominant language is other than English and who have sufficient difficulty speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language as to deny them the opportunity to learn successfully in an English-speaking-only classroom. In the 1993–94 SASS, LEP-related training was defined to include both pre-service (teacher credential) training and in-service (staff development) training. In this brief, teachers with either type of training, regardless of the amount, are regarded as having LEP training.

Public schools in the West had higher percentages of LEP students and teachers with LEP training than did schools in the other three regions.

In 1993–94, U.S. public schools enrolled over 2.1 million LEP students (figure 1), with considerable variation by state and by region (Han, Baker, and Rodriguez, forthcoming). Teachers in regions with larger percentages of LEP students were more likely to have received LEP training than were their counterparts in regions with smaller percentages of these students. Over 12 percent of all students in the West were LEP, and nearly half of their teachers had received LEP training (table 1). In contrast, less than 2 percent of the public school students in the Midwest were classified as LEP, while about 12 percent of their teachers had received LEP training.

Figure 1. Number and percentage of LEP students in public schools, by region: 1993–94



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1993–94 Schools and Staffing Survey (Public School Questionnaire).

Table 1. Percentage of public school teachers with LEP training and with LEP students in their classes, by region and by percentage of LEP students in class: 1993–94

	% of Teachers*
Total	29.5
Region	
Northeast	21.5
Midwest	11.6
South	29.0
West	47.3
% LEP Students in Class	
<10%	19.2
10–25%	42.7
26–50%	62.7
>50%	86.7

* Excludes teachers with no LEP students in their classes.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1993–94 Schools and Staffing Survey (Public School and Teacher Questionnaires).

A pattern similar to that found at the regional level was also found at the classroom level (table 1). For example, almost 87 percent of teachers in classes with more than 50 percent LEP students had received LEP training. About 19 percent of teachers with fewer than 10 percent LEP students in their classes had received LEP training.

Across the core subject areas, almost three-quarters of teachers whose classes included a majority of LEP students had received LEP training.

Table 2 presents the percentages of teachers with LEP students in their classes who had received LEP training, by main teaching assignment field (based on departmentalized instruction) and by classroom LEP enrollment.[1] For teachers of LEP students in each of the four core subjects, teachers in classrooms where more than 50 percent of the students were LEP were more likely to have received LEP training than were teachers in classrooms with fewer than 10 percent LEP students (table 2). In mathematics classes where more than 50 percent of the students were LEP, about 73 percent of teachers had received LEP training. In contrast, in mathematics classes with fewer than 10 percent LEP students, only about 15 percent of teachers had received such training. Similarly, in science and social studies classes with fewer than 10 percent LEP students, about 16 percent of the teachers had received LEP training. For classes with fewer than 10 percent LEP students, teachers of English were more likely to have received LEP-related training than were teachers of other core subjects.

Table 2. Percentage of public school teachers with LEP training and with LEP students in their classes,* by percentage of LEP students in class and by subject: 1993–94

	% LEP Students in Class			
	<10%	10–25%	26–50%	>50%
English	23.8	43.9	55.1	74.7
Mathematics	14.8	33.1	60.2	72.6
Science	15.9	29.4	60.8	70.5
Social Studies	16.4	34.0	55.1	72.2

* Excludes teachers with no LEP students in their classes.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1993–94 Schools and Staffing Survey (Public School and Teacher Questionnaires).

Discussion

Federal and state laws mandate that public education accommodate the needs of LEP students, and as the numbers of LEP students in public schools in the United States continue to grow, issues related to meeting the educational needs of these children will continue to be important. The higher percentages of teachers with LEP training in regions and classrooms with higher percentages of LEP students suggest that efforts are being made to address the needs of LEP children. The SASS data also indicate that teachers of core subject areas with similar percentages of LEP students in their classrooms were about equally likely to have received LEP training, except for higher percentages of English teachers with LEP training in classes with fewer than 10 percent LEP students. This finding is particularly important in light of the recent emphasis on written and verbal skills in science, math, and other academic subjects (e.g., National Research Council 1996). Additional information regarding LEP students and their teachers can be found in Han, Baker, and Rodriguez (forthcoming).

Research is needed on the quality and extent of LEP-related training teachers receive. Pre-service training can involve a single course in a subject such as multicultural education or a series of courses leading to certification as a bilingual teacher, English as a Second Language development specialist, or other LEP-related certification. In-service training tends to be shorter and less in-depth than pre-service training, often consisting of a few one-day seminars on LEP-related teaching techniques and/or issues. Two useful steps in the evaluation of the LEP-related training of public school teachers would be (1) to examine the nature of the training that teachers receive in terms of its breadth, depth, and overall quality, and (2) to examine whether teachers feel that they are well-prepared to deal with students who lack English proficiency.

[1] Although some elementary school teachers with specific core subject assignments are included in table 2, the table is based primarily on secondary school teachers.

References and Related Publications

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This **Issue Brief** was prepared by Elise McCandless, Robert Rossi, and Shannon Daugherty, American Institutes for Research. To obtain standard errors or definitions of terms for this **Issue Brief**, or to obtain additional information about the Schools and Staffing Survey, contact Charles H. Hammer (202) 219-1330. To order additional copies of this **Issue Brief** or other NCES publications, call 1-800-424-1616. NCES publications are available on the Internet at http://www.ed.gov/NCES.

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